

# The Future of U.S. Landpower

## Special Operations Versatility, Marine Corps Utility

By KEVIN D. STRINGER *and*  
KATIE M. SIZEMORE



Army Special Forces on patrol in Iraq

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American military landpower, represented by the U.S. Army and Marine Corps, finds itself in a period of transition. This phase is characterized by troop drawdowns from the decade-long, manpower-intensive counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan; an uncertain budgetary perspective given impending defense cutbacks; and a divisive debate on the appropriate roles and missions for ground forces in the future. This article aims to provide a forward-looking view of U.S. landpower for the next decade. While the sheer difficulty of predicting the future is known, the demands of policy and force planning require some attempt to delineate at least the rough contours of this upcoming period.

To achieve this tour de horizon, the article first provides an overview of the current state of American land forces. It then highlights the fiscal, demographic, and doctrinal challenges that impact American landpower. The authors then propose a more subtle application paradigm for landpower that is both indirect and preventive. The lead instruments for this approach are U.S. special operations forces (SOF) and Marine Air-Ground Task Forces (MAGTFs). Their missions involve interceding in priority geographic combatant command regions to stabilize, prevent, or preclude conflict situations in order to avoid manpower-intensive and costly conventional or counterinsurgency interventions, which will be unsustainable given future fiscal and demographic constraints.

Examples from the most relevant or representative combatant commands for the future—U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM), and U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM)—demonstrate the developing nature of this “light touch” approach. The conclusion supports the premise that demography, finance, and threats dictate a more nuanced and sophisticated use of landpower than in the past.

### Current State and Fiscal Challenges

U.S. landpower consists of its Army and Marine Corps elements, both of which bear consequences from the troop drawdowns in

Iraq and Afghanistan, national demographic trends, and continuing controversy over roles and missions. The Army consists of 45 Active and 28 Reserve Brigade Combat Teams, while the Marine Corps is broken down into 29 Active and 9 Reserve Infantry Battalions.<sup>1</sup> As of June 2011, there were 571,108 Active Army personnel and 200,827 Active Marine personnel stationed worldwide.<sup>2</sup> When former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates itemized the fiscal year 2012 Department of Defense (DOD) budget, he stated that by the beginning of 2012, there would be fewer than 100,000 troops deployed in both Iraq and Afghanistan. He also added that by 2015, Army Active force levels would be reduced by at least 27,000 and the Marine Corps by 15,000 to 20,000 troops, assuming that the majority of troops in Afghanistan exit by 2014. This level would still be 40,000 troops larger than in 2008.<sup>3</sup>

## *demography, finance, and threats dictate a more nuanced and sophisticated use of landpower*

But given a new Presidential strategy that envisions a regional focus on the Asia-Pacific, the Army may be reduced to 490,000 troops from 570,000 and the Marines to 175,000 from 200,000 over the next few years.<sup>4</sup> To place these figures in historical perspective, the Army today has 200,000 fewer Active-duty troops than in 1991.<sup>5</sup> While the projected numbers may seem sufficient for national defense, these troop strengths depend upon a wider and highly volatile fiscal context that could bring further reductions.

In this period of economic uncertainty, Congress is targeting DOD for cost reduction measures. The Congressional Budget Control Act passed in August 2011 seeks to reduce defense spending by \$882 billion over the next 10 years.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, lack of congressional decisionmaking could result in lowered “sequestration” ceilings on spending that would effectively cut more than \$500 billion from what the Pentagon has projected, plus sequestration cuts that would further indiscriminately slash as much as \$500

billion more.<sup>7</sup> In all, sequestration constraints could trim anywhere from \$500 billion to over \$1 trillion from projected long-term defense spending.<sup>8</sup>

The results could be devastating, with grave implications for the land components. As Defense Secretary Leon Panetta stated, “It’s a brigade without bullets. . . . It’s a paper tiger, an Army of barracks, buildings and bombs without enough trained Soldiers able to accomplish the mission. . . . It’s a force that suffers low morale, poor readiness and is unable to keep up with potential adversaries. In effect, it invites aggression.”<sup>9</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey echoed this view by stating that the U.S. military’s capacity to deploy ground forces for future operations would be reduced by around 15 percent as a result of defense spending cuts over the next decade. Concretely, American land forces would retain

capability across the spectrum of conflict, but the frequency and capacity for use would be greatly limited.<sup>10</sup>

In the face of these unprecedented budgetary limits, defense planners face some nightmarish dilemmas about how best to maintain real flexibility and cost effectiveness.<sup>11</sup> For instance, the Middle East remains the highest priority in terms of a continued military commitment, while Africa and Latin America receive the lowest priority for a large American military presence.<sup>12</sup> The Asian theater increases in importance, but it does not require a large number of ground forces. Hence, policymakers must choose how to allocate declining resources and determine which areas require a strong U.S. military land commitment.

### Demographics

In addition to budget cuts, demographic trends have the potential to strain recruiting as well as retention for the land components. Of the military Services, the Army deployed the largest number of personnel to operations in Iraq and Afghanistan but struggled to maintain and increase its end strength in accordance with congressional authorization. With recruiting and retention a stated priority for the Army, 2009 witnessed a decrease in

Dr. Kevin D. Stringer (Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Army Reserve) is an Associate Professor at Webster University Geneva. Katie M. Sizemore is a Master's degree candidate in International Peace and Conflict Resolution in the School of International Service at American University.



recruiting by 14.2 percent, or some 24,120 Soldiers. Retention measurements, referring to the number of Soldiers who reenlist within a given fiscal year, also saw a decrease in 2009 of 3.2 percent, or 3,830 Soldiers.<sup>13</sup> Conversely, the Marine Corps has met or exceeded all of its recruiting goals in terms of quantity and quality every year since 2000, but these goals were lowered by 10 percent over the period 2000–2006.<sup>14</sup> Several studies seem to confirm the challenges of future recruitment in a modern society. One *Armed Forces & Society* article looked at propensity to serve in the military, which is shown to be a strong predictor of actual enlistment. Propensity to serve is declining among American youth, and there are not sufficient “high propensity” youth to meet manpower needs, so harder-to-reach segments must be targeted and recruited.<sup>15</sup> Another study from the same journal explored underlying themes affecting enlistment while illustrating that the U.S. military faces substantial recruiting challenges. These hurdles stem from the high percentage of youth pursuing education beyond high school, cyclical fluctuations in civilian job opportunities, and the occurrence of international events that can lead to periods of heightened concern.<sup>16</sup>

The demographic trend of a “graying” population due to lower birth rates and

longer life expectancies further affects these numbers.<sup>17</sup> This development leaves the American population with a lower number of young people of recruiting age as a proportion of the total population. This phenomenon partially explains the slight decrease seen in 2009 retention. Also, since military personnel tend to retire earlier due to the nature of the system, the overall ground force faces declining numbers at both ends of the military career spectrum.<sup>18</sup> Finally, from a purely supply-side perspective, only 3 out of every 10 young Americans (17–24 years old) meet the medical, educational, and moral standards of the U.S. military.<sup>19</sup> These facts equate to a smaller pool of personnel from which to recruit and retain.<sup>20</sup> These combined fiscal and demographic limits imply a much smaller land component, which must still maintain adequate flexibility and combat power for future contingencies, yet be used sparingly for only the most crucial national security interests.

### Doctrinal Roles

At the same time that American military landpower navigates a period of fiscal and demographic transition, threats to national security continue to multiply. A 2010 U.S. Joint Forces Command<sup>21</sup> study on warfare lends credence to the view that the

future holds a high potential for instability due to demographic, energy, and climate trends.<sup>22</sup> Hostile great powers, once the predominant threats to American security, have been supplanted by rogue states, failed states, and nonstate actors—all of them pursuing asymmetrical strategies to offset U.S. military strengths.<sup>23</sup> In Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia, an intertwined wave of violent extremism and criminality confronts governments and populations.<sup>24</sup> China and other emerging regional powers, often with opaque intentions, represent potential risks too. This future implies the commensurate need for adequate ground forces to address the contingency operations produced by such a volatile world.<sup>25</sup>

American society needs landpower for a diverse set of national security objectives: to fight and win major wars, secure a U.S. presence overseas, confront counterinsurgencies, execute stability operations, and assist in domestic disturbances and national disasters at home and abroad. Yet while the general public can create such task lists, policymakers struggle to organize or prioritize these missions since there is no objective standard to determine what constitutes “enough” security, or what particular mix of goals and resources is best.<sup>26</sup> To address this broad societal mandate, U.S. Army doctrine clearly describes future expectations for an expeditionary, campaign-quality Army that is proficient at full-spectrum operations—conventional warfare, hybrid warfare, irregular warfare, humanitarian assistance, stabilization operations, and any other mission the Nation gives it. The complexity of these missions defies the concept of a “one-size-fits-all” force structure. There are too many variables and uncertainties to expect a homogeneous army to be equally proficient and optimally organized for any mission in any scenario. This combination will most certainly require tradeoffs in force structure, training proficiency, and future acquisition programs.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, the Marine Corps, considered a general purpose force in DOD, operates on the land, sea, and air, but is not optimized to dominate any of them. Rather, the Marine Corps is designed to be expeditionary. Organized in MAGTFs ranging in size from a 2,000-man Marine expeditionary unit (MEU) to a 45,000-man Marine expeditionary force, the Marine Corps can provide rapid response to humanitarian



U.S. Marine Corps (Daniel A. Negrete)

U.S. Marine with Air-Ground Task Force posts security during jungle patrol exercise in Poptun, Guatemala

crises, traditional power projection, forcible-entry capabilities, and sustained, large-scale combat operations.<sup>28</sup>

Yet ongoing military operations in two wars have exposed the difficulties of accomplishing critical policy aims while maintaining flexibility within manpower restrictions. In these conflicts, the Nation relied heavily on the Army to carry a significant portion of the national effort on land.<sup>29</sup> Equally, operations in Iraq and Afghanistan required the Marine Corps to fight as a second land army.<sup>30</sup> These campaigns strained the full-spectrum flexibility of both organizations. This recent history raises an important question for landpower usage in the future: What concept should determine land force employment, training, and structure in a limited personnel and fiscal context? To date, the debate centers around whether conventional means or counterinsurgency concepts should predominate.<sup>31</sup> The next section summarizes this controversy and then offers a relevant third way for consideration.

### Mission Dissonance

Landpower experts typically divide into two camps. Proponents of counterinsurgency such as Colonel Robert M. Cassidy, John Nagl, and David Kilcullen advocate U.S. ground forces addressing asymmetric conflicts for the future. They believe the U.S. military is more likely to be called upon to counter insurgencies, intervene in civil strife and humanitarian crises, rebuild nations, and wage unconventional types of warfare than it is to fight mirror-image armed forces. In this school, U.S. forces should focus on winning the “hearts and minds” of the population through compromise, negotiation, and above all the defeat of the insurgent’s strategy. The essential role of military forces is to create the preconditions necessary for nonmilitary measures to succeed.<sup>32</sup>

Yet such circumstances require large numbers of properly trained ground troops for securing population centers and infrastructure, maintaining order, providing humanitarian relief, and facilitating revived delivery of such fundamental services as electric power, potable water, and refuse collection.<sup>33</sup> As one researcher noted, counterinsurgency campaigns are winnable if they attain a sufficient force density, are defending a generally popular and capable government, and rest largely on the shoulders of indigenous forces who are skilled, flexible, and

respectful of human rights.<sup>34</sup> Sufficient U.S. troop numbers for counterinsurgency would most likely not be available in the future given budgetary and demographic limits. Additionally, institutional resistance stays strong inside the Army, despite recent growth in its special operations components. Though the Marine Corps remains comfortable with counterinsurgency because of its long history of small wars and policing operations, the Army, notwithstanding considerable experience in small wars, has never viewed counterinsurgency as anything other than a diversion from its main mission of conventional combat against like enemies.<sup>35</sup>

Contemporary supporters of the conventional view, notably Colonel Gian Gentile, contend that counterinsurgency has become the new American way of war prematurely and without proper examination.<sup>36</sup> He calls for a reassessment of the doctrine in order to reach a more complete and operational role.<sup>37</sup> Gentile rejects a doctrinal approach that places Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*,

tional conflicts.<sup>38</sup> This article subscribes to this view and proposes an indirect and preventive land force paradigm where worldwide ground engagement is led by SOF and the Marine Corps. This approach finds support from several sources. As Secretary Gates noted in a February 25, 2011, speech at West Point, the United States will not send large land armies into the Middle East again, and the most plausible, high-end scenarios for the U.S. military are primarily naval and air engagements—whether in Asia, the Persian Gulf, or elsewhere. The strategic rationale for swift-moving expeditionary forces, whether Army or Marine, airborne infantry or special operations, is self-evident given the likelihood of counterterrorism, rapid reaction, disaster response, or stability or security force assistance missions.<sup>43</sup> The new DOD strategic guidance confirms that U.S. forces will no longer be sized to conduct large-scale, prolonged stability operations.<sup>44</sup>

With versatility and flexibility vital characteristics for future landpower

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above conventional capacities. He writes that “the future of war is not only the counterinsurgencies of Iraq and Afghanistan” and that “the choice should be to build an army on the organizing principle of fighting.”<sup>38</sup> He demands a military more heavily weighted to the requirements of conventional war.<sup>39</sup> This latter perspective follows the intellectual tradition of Colonel Harry Summers in his 1982 *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*, which repudiated the counterinsurgency lessons of Vietnam.<sup>40</sup> Proponents of this group find succor in the 2008 Russo-Georgian war and the 2006 Lebanon war, both of which demonstrated the need for adequate levels of conventional capabilities.<sup>41</sup>

Given this impasse, it seems a third way is needed for the future. In a prescient article, Michael Cohen summarized thinking on the counterinsurgency and conventional approaches and concluded that both camps have it wrong. He asserted the argument of Steven Metz that, “in the end, perhaps the focus of the U.S. military and American foreign policy, writ large, should be to avoid counterinsurgencies—and to avoid conven-

operations, coupled with the need to husband scarcer ground force personnel, SOF and the Marine Corps both possess capabilities and cultures for early and successful initial ground engagement in the exceedingly complex, unpredictable, and unstructured world that confronts the U.S. military. Their characteristics also complement those of the more conventional Army. While the regular Army remains expert at large-scale land combat and the integration of huge formations against similarly sized foes, SOF concentrate on irregular warfare—that is, counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, psychological operations, and foreign internal defense.<sup>45</sup> The present and future environment is so complex that SOF can use their high levels of warfighting expertise, coupled with cultural knowledge and diplomacy skills, to lay the groundwork for interagency development, defense, and diplomatic activities that contribute to overall U.S. national interests.<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, the Marine Corps offers real cross-functional utility. The Service can bridge the critical seam between Army

and Navy operations, is culturally and operationally adept and comfortable with irregular warfare, and can transition to fight as a second conventional army if needed. While SOF and Marine Corps land activities would be undertaken to preclude larger and more costly interventions, if these “steering” engagements, often interagency in character, are not successful, adequate numbers of heavy Army conventional forces should remain for reinforcement. David E. Johnson eloquently makes this case in a recent RAND study on the future of the heavy army. Army Heavy Brigade Combat Teams provide a crucial hedge against the full range of potential enemies that the United States could face in the future: nonstate irregular, state-sponsored hybrid, and state adversaries.<sup>47</sup> But these assets, most likely limited by fiscal constraints, should be kept in reserve. Rather, the future of landpower employment, based upon regional priorities, already tends toward giving SOF primacy of engagement, while simultaneously utilizing the versatility of the MAGTFs. This trend should be reinforced.

### Landpower by Geographic Combatant Commands

U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM), U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM), USCENTCOM, U.S. European Command (USEUCOM), USPACOM, and USAFRICOM form part of the unified combatant command community and are charged with the command and control of the U.S. military on a geographical basis.<sup>48</sup> This arrangement is controversial. Some experts question whether these commands should be modified or rendered obsolete altogether given the limitations posed by a rigid regional organization that no longer fits comfortably in today’s global security environment.<sup>49</sup> Ambassador Edward Marks, noting that one of our foremost security challenges is international terrorism, makes the following observation:

*The lead for planning (and often conducting) military counterterrorism campaigns falls on the shoulder of [U.S.] Special Operations Command—a global, functional command. Another major security challenge is monitoring and securing weapons of mass destruction . . . a task that falls to another global, functional command—[U.S.] Strategic Command. In other words, the [geographic combatant commands] are not designated as*

*the lead military organization for managing our two primary military challenges.*<sup>50</sup>

Conversely, Ambassador Mary Yates views an interagency combatant command like that found in USAFRICOM as more relevant to the post-9/11 environment through a close integration of both military and civilian efforts.<sup>51</sup> While acknowledging this debate and the imperfections of dividing the world into regional commands, a prioritized combatant command lens provides useful examples to show the utility of SOF and the Marine Corps to shape, influence, manage, or deter specific risks found in key regions in the future.

In terms of priorities for future landpower employment, four of the current combatant commands stand out and illustrate the relevancy of leading with SOF and Marine Corps capabilities. USCENTCOM remains a priority for strategic landpower since it oversees operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, and conducts a theater-wide campaign against al Qaeda.<sup>52</sup> USPACOM’s importance grows as American foreign policy pivots away from the greater Middle East to the Asia-Pacific. President Barack Obama’s

United States. Yet as troop withdrawals continue, the future role of landpower in USCENTCOM is unclear. As Secretary Gates noted, a large land army will not be a part of the U.S. role in the Middle East in the future, but rather a lighter, more diverse force will shape the strategic architecture of U.S. engagement in the region. The reduction of conventional troops will likely place a larger burden on SOF formations as well as increase their roles in the region. As a case in point, the majority of Army Special Forces are operating in the USCENTCOM area of responsibility.<sup>56</sup> In addition to carrying out direct combat and counterterrorism operations, in-theater SOF conduct a wide variety of indirect missions including psychological, training, and support operations for paramilitary forces.<sup>57</sup> Besides SOF, the Marine Corps is active. The 15<sup>th</sup> MEU demonstrated a perfect example of the future of land warfare in USCENTCOM when it simultaneously provided close-air support in Afghanistan, conducted evacuation and disaster-relief operations in Pakistan, and secured and removed suspected pirates from the container ship *Magellan Star* in the Gulf of Aden.<sup>58</sup>

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new “Hedge” strategy confirms this shift.<sup>53</sup> Finally, USAFRICOM is uniquely focused on building security capacities rather than war-fighting and serves as a surrogate example in this section for the equally vital USSOUTHCOM given their similarities in mission.<sup>54</sup> These two latter commands, USAFRICOM and USSOUTHCOM, will merit more attention in the future since instability in these regions is multigenerational and represents a long-term threat to security in an increasingly globalized world.<sup>55</sup> USNORTHCOM and USEUCOM, while important as logistics bases and power projection platforms, are less relevant for the landpower discussion given the lower threat profiles found there.

**USCENTCOM.** While overseeing the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, U.S. Central Command has been the focal point of the combatant command community for most of this decade. Its region includes Pakistan, which together with Afghanistan constitutes the epicenter of the terrorist threat to the

**USPACOM.** Similarly, the security environment in the Pacific demands versatility and flexibility from the military’s land forces. Currently composed of 250,000 personnel, U.S. Pacific Command’s major effort has been enhancing the stability of the Asia-Pacific region. Its main focus areas include strengthening and advancing alliances and partnerships, remaining prepared to respond to a Korean Peninsula contingency, and countering transnational threats.<sup>59</sup>

As in USCENTCOM, SOF are uniquely organized and prepared to counter the present threats. U.S. Special Operations Command Pacific (SOPAC) has increasingly used an indirect approach to combat terrorism in the region and the threats posed by al Qaeda. SOPAC’s efforts consist mostly of foreign internal defense and unconventional warfare. It works closely with host nation militaries and political leadership to foster ties and coordinate efforts so that they can develop the capability to provide security



over the long term. SOCPAC land forces have learned to do more with less via an indirect approach of institution- and capacity-building for addressing asymmetric threats in USPACOM.<sup>60</sup>

In addition to SOCPAC's unique efforts in the region, the self-contained and sea-based MAGTFs are the best kind of fire extinguishers—because of their flexibility, reliability, logistical simplicity, and relative economy.<sup>61</sup> The Marines were scheduled in 2012 to begin reorienting from Afghanistan to the Pacific because of the increasing emphasis on a ground force presence in the region.<sup>62</sup> For example, the Marine Corps showcased its expeditionary force readiness by deploying within 20 hours to Japan and beginning humanitarian assistance following the devastating tsunami in March 2011.<sup>63</sup> Forward-positioned MAGTFs, supported when necessary by immediately deployable reinforcements, enable swift power projection and rapid crisis resolution throughout the USPACOM area of operations.<sup>64</sup>

**USAFRICOM.** Created in 2007 as the newest addition to the geographic combatant commands, U.S. Africa Command covers all 53 countries on that continent. The USAFRICOM mission operates on the

three principles of collaborating with African partners, approaching the continent within a regional framework, and cooperating as part of an interagency team. While a conventional military conflict in Africa is unlikely, the challenges created by crime, poverty, corruption, illicit trafficking of materials, terrorism, and institutional weakness call for a more varied and preventive security cooperation approach.<sup>65</sup> A traditional military culture focused primarily on major land conflict has difficulty using this capacity-building methodology in foreign nations, yet since it is the heart of USAFRICOM's mission, SOF formations, with their versatility, play an important role in its execution.<sup>66</sup>

In September 2011, General Carter Ham, commander of USAFRICOM, asked for more special operations forces. His statement referenced the growing counterterrorism effort in Africa due to signs of increased collaboration between al-Shabaab in East Africa, al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and Nigeria-based Boko Haram.<sup>67</sup> To avoid future high-profile wars, subordinate commanders were told to focus on “smart power”—that is, training national armies to keep the peace and neutralize threats before they reach the headlines.<sup>68</sup> The Army's role

in USAFRICOM places stability operations on par with major combat missions through its SOF elements within Special Operations Command Africa.<sup>69</sup>

Meanwhile, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Africa (MARFORAF) focuses on engagement through military-to-military training with partner nations. In anticipation of this broader future, the Marine Corps created a Security Cooperation Marine Air-Ground Task Force concept tailored for security cooperation and civil-military operations. This force provides another expeditionary option to augment joint and interagency capabilities that are already available to geographic combatant commands. This formation will help partner nations in not only Africa but also Southwest Asia and South America in order to foster stability and prevent conflict in their respective regions.<sup>70</sup>

In Africa, Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force (SPMAGTF) 12 exemplifies this concept by sending small training groups to partner with local militaries in an effort to indirectly blunt the spread of extremist groups across the continent. The task force has dispatched teams across a wide swath of Africa over the course of its 6-month deployment in support of MAR-



U.S. Marines with Echo Company, 4<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion, demonstrate amphibious assault during Marine Week Saint Louis, June 2011

U.S. Marine Corps

FORAF, sending from 5 to 50 Marines into partner nations from days to months at a time. The 180-troop-strong unit was formed over the summer of 2011 from Marine Forces Reserve units and equipped with two KC-130 Hercules aircraft to ferry teams to and from African countries. The unit is among the first of its kind.

In Uganda, the Marine team of force reconnaissance, infantry, and combat-engineering troops taught common soldiering skills that Ugandan soldiers need for use against the brutal Lord's Resistance Army. More specialized follow-on training was designed to help Ugandan field engineers counter al-Shabaab insurgency tactics in Somalia, where urban obstacles and improvised explosive devices reminiscent of the Iraq War are common. This small task force represents one of the first significant security cooperation missions undertaken by DOD in Uganda, a nation more accustomed to State Department interaction.

Under Secretary of the Navy Robert Work singled out the task force as a prime example of the type of "low footprint, high payoff operations" the White House is seeking as a means of maintaining global defense postures as the Pentagon pledges to cut at least \$450 billion in spending over the next decade. Using a small group such as the one in Uganda could simplify the complex politics associated with deploying and hosting troops in a foreign nation. During testimony to Congress on February 29, 2012, General Ham noted that African

nations' reluctance to host large numbers of U.S. troops was one reason for USAFRICOM headquarters to remain in Europe despite growing threats in Africa. SPMAGTF 12 missions on the continent could represent an early example of a long-heralded Marine Corps return to quick reaction operations.<sup>71</sup>

## Conclusion

While many uncertainties cloud the future, the United States must possess a flexible land force—one that can engage, respond, and project—to operate across the domains that challenge its ability to execute global responsibilities.<sup>72</sup> Yet demographic, financial, and future threat parameters dictate that the use of landpower must become more nuanced and sophisticated than in the past.

Rather than argue the merits of counterinsurgency or conventional approaches for the future, the U.S. military should concentrate on a subtler application paradigm for landpower that is both indirect and preventive. In this setting, SOF and MAGTFs lead the ground force effort to prevent, deter, and contain threats in USCENTCOM, USPACOM, USAFRICOM, and USSOUTHCOM in order to avoid manpower-intensive engagements. Conventional and heavy land forces remain on hand, but they are husbanded as the strategic reserve to be used only if the SOF and MAGTF efforts fail. This model still allows "strategic pluralism," an approach that calls for a wide variety of military forces and weapons to meet a diversity of threats.<sup>73</sup>

President Obama's decision announced in November 2011 to redeploy 2,500 Marines to Australia in order to expand and solidify military alliances with Asia, and subsequent policy documents, provide a glimpse into this evolving future of American landpower. Small, versatile forces judiciously placed in key locations to symbolize long-term American military commitment could provide expandable platforms for capabilities across a range of missions—humanitarian crises, power projection, and disaster relief. This blueprint mirrors the new strategic guidance that states, "Whenever possible, we will develop innovative, low-cost, and small footprint approaches to achieve our national security objectives."<sup>74</sup> This foretaste demonstrates that even in times of stringent budgetary cuts and adverse demographic trends, the measured use of landpower remains a strategic tool for projecting American interests and influence abroad.<sup>75</sup> **JFQ**

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Frank A. DiStasio, Jr., *The Army Budget Fiscal Year 2012: An Analysis* (Arlington, VA: Association of the United States Army, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> "Active Duty Military Personnel by Regional Area and by Country," Department of Defense, Defense Manpower Data Center, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> DiStasio.

<sup>4</sup> Mackubin Thomas Owens, "The President's Risky Defense Strategy," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 6, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Max Boot, "Slashing America's Defense: A Suicidal Trajectory," *Commentary*, January 2012, available at <[www.commentarymagazine.com/article/slashing-americas-defense-a-suicidal-trajectory/](http://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/slashing-americas-defense-a-suicidal-trajectory/)>.

<sup>6</sup> David W. Barno, Nora Bensahel, and Travis Sharp, "How to Cut the Defense Budget Responsibly," *Foreign Affairs*, November 2, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Based on President Barack Obama's fiscal year 2012 budget proposal to spend over the next 10 years.

<sup>8</sup> *Defense Spending, the Super Committee, and the Price of Greatness* (Washington, DC: Defending Defense Project, November 17, 2011), available at <[http://thf\\_media.s3.amazonaws.com/2011/pdf/defendingdefense.pdf](http://thf_media.s3.amazonaws.com/2011/pdf/defendingdefense.pdf)>.

<sup>9</sup> Leon Panetta, Department of Defense news conference, Washington, DC, November 10, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> James Blitz, "U.S. military cuts will affect ground forces, says Dempsey," *The Financial Times*, December 1, 2011, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Philip Sabin, *The Current and Future Utility of Air & Space Power*, Discussion Paper No.1 (Wilt-

Security force team member for PRT Farah provides security during key leader engagement



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